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Message Text

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ACTION PC-01

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 ISO-00 MMO-01 /013 W
----------076536 051606Z /75
P R 051257Z JUN 78
FM AMEMBASSY GABORONE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2385
INFO AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN
AMEMBASSY MASERU
AMEMBASSY MBABANE
AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

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CAPE TOWN FOR EMBASSY

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: OTRA, SHUM, BC, LT, WZ
SUBJECT: TRAVEL BY PCVS TO SOUTH AFRICA

REF: (A) GABORONE 1032, (B) STATE 121829, (C) STATE 137299,
(D) GABORONE 1625

1. CURRENT PRESS STORIES IN U.S. AND SOUTH AFRICA HAVE GIVEN WIDESPREAD PUBLIC ATTENTION TO CONSEQUENCES OF PEACE CORPS' POLICY OF WITHHOLDING FUNDING FOR ROUTINE MEDICAL CARE IN SOUTH AFRICA. PRESS ACCOUNTS HAVE REFLECTED THE REACTIONS OF TWO PCVS WHO TRAVELLED TO FRANKFURT TO OBTAIN MEDICAL CARE WHICH THEY JUDGED TO BE INFERIOR TO TREATMENT THEY COULD HAVE RECEIVED IN SOUTH AFRICA.

2. PCV COMPLAINTS. WHILE SOME OF THESE PRESS ACCOUNTS CONTAIN INACCURACIES (REF D), THEY ARE THE KIND OF ADVERSE IMPLICATIONS AND COMPLAINTS ANTICIPATED IN EMBASSY'S EARLIER ANALYSIS (REF A).QPECIFICALLY A NUMBER OF PCVS HAVE COMPLAINED THAT P.C. TRAVEL POLICY VIOLATES THEIR RIGHT TO
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TRAVEL FREELY AND WASTES TAXPAYERS MONEY. MOREOVER, THOSE VOLUNTEERS WHO HAVE BEEN EVACUATED TO FRANKFURT HAVE SUCCEEDED IN CONVINCING A NUMBER OF OTHER VOLUNTEERS THAT THE DIFFICULTIES OF FOURTEEN-HOUR TRIP TO FRANKFURT AND THE COMPARATIVELY LOW QUALITY OF MEDICAL CARE AVAILABLE WHEN THEY ARRIVE OUTWEIGH ANY POSSIBLE BENEFITS THAT MIGHT BE DRIVED. WE HAVE SEVERAL REPORTS THAT

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PCVS ARE POSTPONING OR AVOIDING NEEDED MEDICAL TREAT-
MENT RATHER THAN ACCEPT MEDEVAC TO FRANKFURT.

3. RECENT MODIFICATION OF MEDICAL TRAVEL POLICY (REF B)
APPEARED TO GIVE PCDS RIGHT TO APPROVE MEDICAL TRAVEL TO
RSA IN CASES (A) IF JUDGED TO BE "SERIOUS" BY PCMO AND
(B) IF PCV HAS NO OBJECTION TO TRAVEL IN RSA. HOWEVER,
THIS INSTRUCTION STILL LEAVES PCDS IN DIFFICULT, IF NOT
UNTENABLE, POSITION OF HAVING TO DECIDE WHAT CONSTITUTES
A /SERIOUS" CASE. EFFORTS TO OBTAIN FURTHER CLARIFICA-
TION OF POLICY HAS FAILED (REF C) WHICH HAS LEFT PCDS
WITH WHAT THEY BELIEVE IS CONTINUED MEDEVACING TO FRANK-
FURT -- WHICH RISKS GREATER PCV DISSENSION AND DISSATIS-
FACTION. MOREOVER, IRONIC SITUATION IS CREATED WHEREBY
A "SERIOUS" COIDITION CAN BE TREATED IN RSA WHILE A ROUTINE
CHECKUP OR SIMPLE MEDICAL PROCEDURE, E.G. ONE THAT CANNOT
BE PERFORMED IN BLS, REQUIRES MEDEVAC TO FRANKFURT.
THE RESULT, AS NOTED, IS THAT PCVS ARE POSTPONING OR
IGNORING IMPORTANT BUT PERHAPS STILL "ROUTINE" AND NON
"LIFE THREATENING" HEALTH PROBLEMS UNTIL THEY BECOME
SERIOUS OR "LIFE THREATENING". IN OTHER WORDS, THE POLICY
HAS ALREADY RESULTED IN ADVERSE CONSEQUENCES FOR PCV HEALTH AND
MORALE.

4. A FINAL IRONY OF THE POLICY IS THAT PCVS CONTINUE
TO TRAVEL TO SOUTH AFRICA ON VACATION OR FOR OTHER PER-
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SONAL BUSINESS. MANY PCVS WITH WHOM WE HAVE TALKED
BELIEVE THAT EXPERIENCE OF TRAVEL IN SOUTH
AFRICA IS BENEFICIAL, IF NOT ESSENTIAL, TO GAINING A
PERSONAL AWARENESS OF THE DILEMMAS INHERENT IN THE
SOUTH AFRICAN SITUATION. MOREOVER, THE CASE FOR AVOI-
DANCE OF TRAVEL IN SOUTH AFRICA ON MORAL GROUNDS IS
INEVITABLY WEAKENED BY FACT THAT NO OTHER USG EMPLOYEES
ARE URGED NOT TO TRAVEL IN RSA. IN ADDITION, THE
CATHOLIC BISHOP FOR BOTSWANA TOLD ME JUNE 4 THAT HE
CONSIDERED "IMMORAL" THE EXPENDITURE OF TAXPAYERS'
MONEY TO SEND PCVS TO FRANKFURT GIVEN THE EXTENT OF
HUMAN NEEDS IN THE WORLD. PCVS ARE ALSO ACUTELY
AWARE OF THE APPARENT CONTRADICTION BETWEEN PC TRAVEL
POLICY AND LIBERALIZED USG TRAVEL POLICY TO REGIMES
SUCH AS CUBA, CAMBODIA, NORTH VIETNAM AND NORTH KOREA.
SINCE PC LACKS AUTHORITY TO IMPOSE SANCTIONS FOR TRAVEL
TO RSA, MANY PCVS IGNORE WHAT THEY REGARD AS A MISGUIDED
POLICY. CONSEQUENTLY, WHILE PCVS STILL FREELY TRAVEL
FOR PLEASURE IN SOUTH AFRICA, THEY CANNOT HAVE THEIR
ROUTINE BUT ESSENTIAL MEDICAL PROBLEMS TREATED THERE
EXCEPT AT THEIR OWN EXPENSE.

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5. EMBASSY RECOMMENDS RECONSIDERATION OF PC POLICY ON MEDICAL TRAVEL IN INTEREST OF MAINTAINING EFFECTIVENESS OF PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS AND PROGRAM AND INSURING WELFARE AND MORALE OF PCVS WHO SERVE IN BLS COUNTRIES. PC MEDICAL POLICY AS NOW PROMULGATED THREATENS TO UNDER-MINE THOSE EFFORTS AND IMPAIR PROGRAMS TO ACHIEVE THESE OBJECTIVES.
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